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The Cultural Setting

576 Bemba ideal behaviour is that of the *mwina umusumba* or man living at the court, as distinct from the *mwina impanga* or inhabitant of the bush; the country bumpkin.

577 565 A commoner is expected to be loyal to the death to his chief, and to accept the fact that his rulers have the right to all his time and all his possessions. He must be silent and respectful. Members of the crocodile clan are expected to be arrogant and even ruthless, but they must be generous in feeding their adherents.

888 561 Extreme deference is paid to age. Each child knows his exact position of seniority in a group of village children and is given precedence in games. Each group of men sitting in the village shelter does the same. A younger child is scolded for putting itself forward before its elders.

562 622 Bemba women share many of these ideals. They work for their chief in his gardens and make the same abject obeisance to him. They have a lively interest in the ritual centred in the court. They play an important part in attracting followers and kinsmen to a village. A headman's following or 'crowd' (*bumba*) is attracted by means of beer, good entertainment and company, and these depend both on the successful organization of labour, which is largely a man's job, and on the wise and tactful distribution of food, and happy personal relations, which are mainly in the women's sphere.

562 842 888 Women, unlike men, are admired for industry and for resource in finding food in the bush. They are honoured for bearing and rearing many children and for courage in childbirth which is often, under Bemba conditions, a terrible ordeal. They are expected to be loyal to their own sex and to accept the domination of older women.

562 644 622 In the sphere of tribal life women have an important part to play, or rather one that is thought to be important. As we saw, two senior princesses have districts of their own; and junior princesses often act as village 'headmen'. In all these cases they wield political authority but are regarded as chiefs with feminine attributes, that is to say, with more gentleness and hospitality to the needy. They are not expected to be ruthless in discipline. They have male counsellors to advise and support them. Besides these real political functions the senior women have important ritual duties since, like their 'brothers', they are in charge of

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the exclusion of the functions the rite performs for the individual, the role aspirant, as I have called her here.

Another device which is prominent in the chisungu is of course the mechanism of the sacred emblem and its associated formula. This ritual pattern is also very common in ceremonies intended for the passing on of roles or of systems of values. In the chisungu a series of related ideas are associated with certain symbols, the pottery figurines, and with fixed forms of words, the doggerel rhymes that are sung. This is a very interesting mechanism and one that is of very wide use in Bantu Africa as Cory and others have shown.[1] First it is evident that the designs and the pottery emblems form a sort of *aide-mémoire*. Women started to hum the songs when they saw the *mbusa*, as I observed myself when watching the making of the pottery figurines. Mrs. Culwick was told specifically by a Bena woman that the models were useful to make women remember the songs.

It became clear to me also in the course of Bemba village life that the figurines not only act as mnemonics for the songs but that they also come to represent moral attitudes and obligations and to represent them in a quotable form. I have heard a line of such a rhyme shouted by a girl's mother to an idle bride as a form of rebuke. On an occasion when a young married woman was tempted to go off to a beer-drink and leave her baby unguarded in the hut behind, an older woman suddenly shouted to her the song associated with the house *mbusa* (cf. Appendix B, No. 51). This song calls to mind the moral tale of the mother who leaves her baby alone in the house so that it falls into the fire and gets burnt. The girl in question looked irritated and impatient, and then shrugged her shoulders, gave up her project and went inside her house. In such circumstances the chisungu rhymes enable the Bemba to give formal expression to public morality. In other words the seemingly meaningless doggerel becomes a weapon. Bemba women recognize this as is shown from the comment made on the crocodile model. 'The girl will remember "that is what they taught me by the crocodile".'

[1] Cf. H. Cory, 'Figurines used in the initiation ceremonies of the Nguu of Tanganyika', *Africa*, vol. XIV, 1943–4. Such figurines also occur among the Bena. Cf. A. T. and G. C. Culwick, *Ubena of the Rivers*, 1944.